

Grant's Prowess at the Battle of Shiloh

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What is so important about the Battle of Shiloh? The Battle of Shiloh is important for one reason and one reason only: trade! The Union battle plan, the Anaconda Plan, was a strategy to cut off the Confederate trade and supply routes. They gave it the name Anaconda because like the Anaconda snake, which kills its victim by constricting the victim to death, the Union army aimed to cut off Confederate trade routes and therefore the supply lines. If the South lost its rail and water supply lines, the war could be significantly shortened. The South's "Cotton Kingdom" used rail and water transportation while the road systems of the South were not designed to handle a large amount of trade. If the Union Army could cut the Southern trade and supply lines, the time it would take for a Union victory would be reduced.

The Battle of Shiloh was also important to the history of Illinois in that it gave President Lincoln a second term in office. It would also produce a Galena, Illinois native, Ulysses S. Grant, who would gain fame as a general at Shiloh and eventually become President of the United States.

The first military strategy offered to President Abraham Lincoln for crushing the rebellion of Southern states was devised by Union General-in-Chief Winfield Scott. From April 1 through early May 1861 Scott briefed the president daily, often in person, on the national military situation; the results of these briefings were used by Scott to work out Union military aims.

About May 3 Scott told his protégé, Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan that he believed an effective "blockade" of Southern ports, a strong thrust down the Mississippi Valley with a large force, and the establishment of a line of strong Federal positions there would isolate the disorganized Confederate Nation "and bring it to terms." Scott then presented it to the president, in greater detail, proposing that 60,000 troops move down the Mississippi with gunboats until they had secured the river from Cairo, Illinois, to the Gulf, which, in concert with an effective blockade, would seal off the South. Then, he believed, Federal troops should stop, waiting for Southern Union sympathizers to turn on

their Confederate governors and compel them to surrender. It was Scott's belief that sympathy for secession was not as strong as it appeared and that isolation and pressure would make the "fire-eaters" back down and allow calmer heads to take control.

But the war-fevered nation wanted combat, not armed diplomacy, and the passive features of Scott's plan were ridiculed as a proposal "to squeeze the South to military death." The press, recalling McClellan's alleged "boa-constrictor" remark, named the plan after a different constricting snake, the anaconda.

Meanwhile, Ulysses S. Grant was given command of a regiment of Illinois soldiers charged with creating havoc along the Mississippi River. His troops had taken Fort Henry and Fort Donelson already in Tennessee since taking command at Cairo, Illinois, and moved across to Paducah, Kentucky. General Ulysses S. Grant was not present on the field on the morning of April 6, 1862, when his Army of the Tennessee was surprised by Confederate forces commanded by Albert Sidney Johnston, but arrived as the battle was in full swing. Federal forces fought back stubbornly as they recovered from their initial surprise, and Johnston was killed in the fighting. The Confederates generally had the best of the action as the first day drew to a close.

Elements of Don Carlos Buell's Federal Army of the Ohio arrived late in the day and through the night. When fighting resumed the next day, the Union forces managed to turn the tide of the battle, and the Confederates retreated from the field. Grant was blamed for the poor state of readiness of his troops, and for the extremely high casualty rate. Shiloh was the fiercest battle fought during the war up to that time, and it shocked the nation. Here are some excerpts of Grant's brief report of the battle and his congratulatory order to his troops:

- My force was too much fatigued from two days' hard fighting and exposure in the open air to a drenching rain during the intervening night to pursue immediately.
- Night closed in cloudy and with heavy rain, making the roads impracticable

for artillery by the next morning. General Sherman, however, followed the enemy, finding that the main part of the army had retreated in good order.

- I feel it a duty, however, to a gallant and able officer, Brig. Gen. W. T. Sherman, to make a special mention. He not only was with his command during the entire two days' action, but displayed great judgment and skill in the management of his men. Although severely wounded in the hand the first day his place was never vacant. He was again wounded, and had three horses killed under him.

These journals give a unique perspective into the mindset of what happened during and after the battle.

The first shot was fired by a group of Confederate snipers firing at General William Tecumseh Sherman. He survived a buck shot wound to his hand. After this moment, two days of violence erupted. The word Shiloh means "place of peace." It would be anything but peaceful during the next days. The Union army was taken completely by surprise. Many fled to the Tennessee River, which was not a good choice. Many soldiers died while running from the Confederates. Running in straight line while shoots at you from behind makes you easy prey, especially if they have cannons. Once the attack started, there was mass confusion on both sides. Most of the boys had never been in the line of battle before and did not know their orders. It was a murderous fistfight. During the battle. General Johnston of the Confederacy was killed. If he had not been killed, he may have had his men march straight to the Tennessee River to finish off what was left of the Union army. But P.T. Beauregard, who replaced Johnston, made a decision to rest his troops for the night. This was another mistake because Union General Ulysses S. Grant had his men ambush this position the next morning. As with the first Battle of Bull Run, the South lost another chance to swing the war in its favor.

The aftermath of the Battle of Shiloh made people realize that the war was far from over. It also made people realize that the Civil War would be very costly in men and material. The Union army had captured Corinth and taken control of the Mississippi River north of that point. Shiloh was a decisive battle in the war. The South needed to save the Mississippi Valley. Memphis and Vicksburg were now vulnerable to Union

attack. After Corinth, there is no doubt those cities would be the next to fall. Therefore, some of the rail and water routes were cut off for the Confederate Army. This was important because with the loss of some of the South's rail and water transportation routes, the Southern army could not get many major supplies and communications to sustain its cause and win the war. This also started to give control of southern water and rail supply lines to the Union army. The "Anaconda" was starting to "constrict" more harshly. The battle was not the end of the war, but it was most likely the beginning of the end of the Confederate cause.

The Battle of Shiloh was dramatic and brutal. The battle's end result would lead to further constriction of the Confederate trade and supply lines. The event showed the South depended heavily on rail and water transport to keep their war effort alive. Although the war would last another three years, in a sense this battle was the beginning of the end. Without the trade routes, the Southern cause was doomed. [From The Anaconda Plan <<http://www.civilwarhome.com/anacondaplan.html>> (Dec. 14, 2004); The Battle of Shiloh <<http://www.genocities.com/heartland/acres/1257/shiloh.html>> (Dec. 14, 2004); General Grant's Report of the Battle of Shiloh <<http://www.swcivilwar.com/GrantReportShiloh.html>> (Dec. 14, 2004).]